[J. J. Woody]

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FOLKSTUFF - RANGELORE

Phipps, Woody

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 [86?]

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J.J. Woody, 76, was born on his father's stock farm in Wise Co., Tex. Due to the Indian depredations following the Civil War, his father, Sam Woody, who was among the first settlers in Wise Co., built the first house, bought the first sewing machine, the first painted wagon, the first reaper, and the first cook stove in Wise Co., converted the ranch into a stock farm. Woody was taught to ride a horse at an early age, and worked as a cowboy before he was eight. He went to Albany, Texas, in 1880, to help an elder brother operate a mercantile store. They moved to Abilene the next year, and established the same business there. Woody quit his brother in 1885, to go to Ft Worth, Texas, to shape his future there. After being employed by several mercantile stores there, he entered the employ of W.C. Stripling and Co., where he has now been employed for 33 Yrs., resides at 2306 Harrison, and spends his week ends on his ranch near Decatur, Tex. His story:

“While I was really born right on the range, I quit it as early as 1880, and never returned to make a living by punching cows. Now, I know quite a few cattlemen who have had quite an experience on the range, among them my father. I will tell you about them as soon as I finish about myself. I was born on my dad's ranch in Wise county, on Feb. 27, 1862. Now,

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I've never known just how many head dad ran, because he sold off nearly all his stock right after the Civil War, and formed a stock farm. The Indians caused him to do that when they got so mean after the war.

“The Indians really cut a figure in those days. While I never saw this happen, I saw the girl right after she was killed by the Indians. Sally Bette Bowman's father had a good many horses, and the Indians were awful bad about stealing them. In fact, oxen almost replaced horses for awhile there. Well, Sally Bette was up Deep Creek, watching the horse herd when a band of Indians showed up. C12 - Texas 2 She knew her life was in danger, so she tried to get away from them. Since she was riding an awfully good horse, she almost made it. Those Indians chased her for three miles, then when she was right near a neighbor's house, they opened fire and killed her. The woman of the house happened to be looking, and she saw them scalp her after she fell from her horse. They couldn't catch the horse, though, and it went on to the ranch house. When her father saw the horse come into the yard without her, he and several men started out.to see what was wrong. They found the girl alright, but the Indians had gotten away with the horse herd. Dad took me over to the place and I saw the girl before she was taken home.

“The last Indian killing happened close to us. The family's name was Huff, and the old man happened to be some piece away from the house when the Indians showed up. There were too many for him to fight, so he ran off up the hill to get some help at his nearest neighbor's. There were too many Indians for them too, so they all set out and walked 15 miles through the night to our place. I remember them waking us up, and we spent the rest of the night talking about it. When we went over there the next morning, his wife and children were dead.

“Those were hard times for the early settlers. I guess if I'd have been there, I would have quit when the Indians first started. Many's the night we've all gone to bed with our parents saying they'd leave the next morning. Things would be different, though, the next morning. We'd wake up, the sun'd be shining, not an Indian would be in sight, and if we left, we'd

be leaving every thing we had in this world, so they'd just change their minds and stay. 3 “The early settlers were so anxious to have neighbors that they'd give a man 160 acres off their places just to have him settle and be a neighbor. Besides just being a neighbor, dad wanted some one to talk to. You know, there were so telephones, newspapers, mail, or anything for the settlers then. The President could be dead for months and the settlers not even know it. No matter who the man was, when he rode up to our place, dad was always real glad to see him, and he could stay a week if he wanted to.

“I remember one night in particular when a party of prospectors were in our section, and a bad Norther come up. Well, they had to have some protection, and there wasn't any unless you were in a house. They all came to our house, and there was 16 of them. Dad invited them all in, then went outside and built a big fire. After he had it going real good, he hollered out, 'You fellows come out here to the parlor while Mrs Woody gets us a bite to eat. You know, the house was so small, that she couldn't work while they were in there. It wasn't the food, because that's the one thing there was plenty of in those days. Good food too!

“About the house, it was the first in Wise County, being built on Deep Creek in 1854. Dad was a progressive man, being the first to put up a house, buy a reaper, sewing machine, cook stove painted wagon, anything he could get that would make life easier for my mother. Let me tell you about that wagon, though, before I go on about the early life.

“Dad came from Fort Worth to Wise County, and naturally knew everybody in Fort Worth. He took his wagon to Fort Worth before it's first wagon got there, and took all the lawyer's, preacher's, and business men's wives out into the country for a 4 ride in that wagon. Now, there were wagons here, alright, but they were all ugly, had wooden axles, and made a lot of noise. This Studebaker wagon was real quiet, had the prettiest paint on it, and rode a whole lot easier than the other wagons. Dad's laughed about that many a time since then, about how he took all the big shots' wives out into the country for a ride in his wagon.

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“Now, back to the early life. In those days, there were what they called 'Circuit Riders,' who were really traveling preachers for the different denominations. Dad was always glad to see one of them ride up, and before he'd even speak to the preacher, he'd tell us kids to grab a horse and light out to all the neighbors and tell them to come to our house for a meeting.

“We'd make a 30 milescircle, tell them all, and they'd just about every one be there that night. Preachers in those days didn't preach like they do today. They'd preach almost all night. I can remember many a time when after making a few remarks, the preacher'd reach up on the mantle, take down the bottle, take a couple of drinks, snort once or twice, then be off. That whiskey just seemed to warm them up and prime them for a night. We kids'd lay down on the floor and go off to sleep, him still a-preaching.

“The Woodys originally came from Tennessee, and my granddad's name was Sam Woody too. He settled later on about 20 miles South of us. Back in Tennessee, the Woodys were all foot washing Hard Shell Baptists. The Hard Shell preachers'd go to his place first, then come on over to our's. Dad was baptized, but wouldn't join any church because he wanted those circuit riders to keep coming, and he was afraid if he joined any certain church, the others would stop coming, and they were his source of news with 5 the outside. His greatest delight was when two of them from different denominations came in at the same time. They'd argue scripture then, and dad learned a whole lot that way. He couldn't read or write, but he heard so much Bible that he knew as much as some of the preachers.

“There's one thing I guess I should have told at the first, I suppose, and that's dad's part in having Tarrant County's Court house moved to Fort Worth from Birdville. Dad had always been interested in Fort Worth, and when the big chance came, he was really interested. He came down to Fort Worth just before the election, and when it looked to him like Birdville was going to win, he went back to Wise county and got 13 of his neighbors.to

come down. He made them stay sober 'til after they's voted and the count was made, then they all celebrated. Fort Worth won by seven votes!

“Quite a lot of trouble was stirred up over the election, especially after people found out what dad'd done. One man, a big rancher near Birdville by the name of J.B. Walker, threatened to kill dad on site. From a lot of people, that wouldn't have sounded so bad but from him, it was different because he'd already killed one man.

About six weeks, two months later, dad recognized him riding down the road toward him. Dad was unarmed and couldn't afford to turn his back to him, so he just rode on. As soon's they got into talking distance, dad said, 'Hello, Mr. Walker: Glad to see you,' then fell to talking about the weather, beef prices, and anything else 'til Walker cooled off. Finally, when Walker did get in a word, he fell to talking about the election. Dad turned that off this way, 'Well, Mr. Walker, they're going to have a big town 6 down there some day, and a big town has to have water! There couldn't ever be a big town at Birdville because there's no water, and they've got the Trinity River down there.' Of course, that was before the day of deep wells. They talked a little farther, then parted. Later on, they became good friends.

“I guess it's in order now to talk about myself a little. I actually don't remember when I did start to riding horses. I've been riding them ever since I can remember, and still ride them on week ends when I go up to Wise county to the ranch. I guess I was riding herd when I was six. I know I wasn't much over seven, if that old, when my brothers and myself rounded up a herd of cattle. The older boys left me and a younger brother to take care of the herd while they went on farther, and gathered more cattle.

“A little while after they left, it started in to raining. Now, if that's all that happened when it rained around a herd of cattle, it'd be alright, but that's not all that happens. The herd will always get up, and start to drifting. We two boys tried to stop the herd from drifting, and it seemed like the harder we worked, the faster the herd drifted. Pretty soon, our brothers showed up and helped us out. They figured we'd try to stop the herd, but they knew better

than to try that. What they did was to have us all get out in front, and slow the herd down by getting in front of the leaders with our horses.

“Of course, we had plenty of stampedes and all, but that was just as much a part of the work as riding the horses was. I can't even remember any stampedes because we didn't pay any attention to them. All they did was to cause us a lot of extra work. The reason there were so many stampedes was because anything, any slight 7 noise that's unusual will put a herd to running almost before you could say 'Jack Robinson!' The herd could be bedded down, with every head bowed, and a wolf could howl close by, one or two of them would snort, more would snort, and they'd be off like a train as fast as they could run. It'd take us maybe two or three days to regather the herd, and it'd be skittish even then, and ready for another stomp. We'd have to keep riding around the herd, singing cowboy songs, and be careful about making any more noise.

“Since it was important to be able to ride a horse good, I always tried to improve on my riding, and rode some pretty bad horses. I had a cousin, Joe Woody, that was a good rider. He had a ranch in Taylor county. I don't know how many head, or what brand, because I was never out to his place. He came to our place many a time, and I've heard him tell about an Indian fight lots of times.

“He and six or seven cowboys were out rounding up some cattle, when a band of Indians jumped them. They just happened to be on top of a small hill, and there was a gully right in the middle of it, big enough to be a small trench. The Indians' first shots killed Joe's horse and one of the cowboys before they could get down and take shelter. After that, the fight lasted all day. Joe had a little nigger boy that loaded his pistols for him. As the Indians'd ride over the top of the hill at them, they'd shoot. Joe never did know how many Indians they killed because they'd drag their dead off with them. When dark came, the Indians left, and the cowboys were able to take the dead one with them to the ranch house. 8 “I loved to make trips on horse back to some place, but was never allowed to go with dad when he made those trips to get provisions at Jefferson, Texas. The trip would take him all Spring

by ox wagon. Then when horses were used more, stores were opened up closer. My first trip of any consequence was to Albany in 1880, to help one of my older brothers operate a dry goods store he opened up there.

“Albany was dependent on the surrounding ranches for it's trade. While I don't know whether I ever herd how many cattle each ranch had, I'm sure I did know the brands, but I've forgotten them since I left there. The Waggoners, Goodnights, Mathews, Conrads, Reynolds, Lynches, and others had big ranches whose cattle drifted past Albany and for several hundred miles South. I do remember the Lynch brand because of it's name. Their's was the 'Buzzard Brand,' so-called because it was a lazy M, and made like this:

“I've read of roundups, and heard of them, but the roundup held yearly at Albany beat anything I ever heard of. All the ranchers hired two-three-four cowboys extra, according to the number of cattle they owned, and send them South to roundup all the cattle bearing brands in the Territory around Albany. These cowboys would bring over 10,000 head of cattle to Albany.

“Then all the ranchers would bring their men and start cutting out their cattle. Now, this is where lots of trouble started, and many a man was murdered. In fact, the Waggoners, the Goodnights, and the other big ranchers wouldn't even go to the herd but would hire the toughest men money could find to represent them. They'd hire gunslingers that had already made their mark, and these gunslingers 9 were crack shots who depended on their shooting ability to get them good jobs on ranches that paid a larger wage for them.

“One of the most noted things about ranchers of that day, was their independence of each other. When one of the ranchers decided on a place to park the cattle he cut out of the herd, he felt that he was doing the right thing. Sometimes, some of the other cattlemen would feel like maybe he'd made a mistake or two, and they'd inspect his herd, and maybe cut a cow or two out that they felt belonged to them. When they did, there was usually a gun fight and some one got killed. That was where the hired gunslingers came in, and the

main reason they were hired. The big owners felt like if there was any shooting to be done, they didn't want to be in on it but wanted a mighty fast man there to take care of their end.

“After the roundup was over, all the men'd come into town to spend their wages. That was when we'd really sell the goods but it was also a time of worrying because these fellows would drink a lot of whiskey, and do a lot of shooting. The shootings were usually at night, after we'd gone to bed. I already had my bed on the ground, and when those bullets began to flying around, you can bet I was sure laying close to that ground. You see, all the stores, saloons, cafes, bawdy houses and so on, were in tents, and a tent doesn't afford much protection. That was to just to start with, though, because as fast as lumber could be hauled in, buildings were thrown up. Buildings with high fronts to make it look as if they were bigger than they really were.

“That was the year the Government decided to kill out all the buffalo to keep the Indians satisfied on the reservations. You 10 see, the Indians were put on their reservations to stay alright, but as long's there was buffalo on the plains, they'd leave. That wouldn't have been so bad, but they'd have to steal horses to ride, and maybe somebody'd be killed in the stealing. Then, they'd steal beef to eat while hunting the buffalo, and all in all, they were quite a bit of trouble.

“The Government hired every buffalo hunter it could find, and they killed buffalo anywhere they found them. Not for the meat, but just to kill them. All the hunters'd do, would be to skin the buffalo and bring the skins to some center, where the hides would be shipped back East.

“You talk about your scrap iron piles nowadays. Theses piles are nothing to the piles of bones brought in the next year after the buffalo were killed out. There would be piles of bones and horns along the rail road tracks for miles, and there'd be buyers like there are today for scrap iron. There was so much money in bones that help was hard to hire. They'd all be out gathering bones to haul to the nearest railroad.

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“In '81 and '82, my brother and I went to Abilene, where we set our store up. That was just like Albany. A city of tents, and we had the same worries about the cowboys coming into town and getting drunk on paydays. Of course, that was when they spent their money with us for classes, but we did wish they'd not shoot the town up afterwards.

“At the last of '82, I decided to go to Fort Worth to make a future for myself. I first went to work for Malone-Walker, a big dry goods store, then went to work for B.C. Evans for a number 11 of years. After I'd been working for Evans for about six years, the man in charge of the men's ready to wear shot him in a fit of jealousy because he'd went across the street and hired a competitor. The reason he hired this other man was because the clerk had been drinking a good deal, and in order not to fire him, and still have a good man in charge of the department, he hired the competitor.

“Several years later, the store went bankrupt and I went to work for Striplings. I've now been with Striplings for 33 years. Since I went to work here, I've bought out all my brothers and sisters interest in the old home ranch, and now own one place of 1,450 acres with 125 acres of it in the city limits of Decatur. There's another place of 300 acres I own, but it's not on the home ranch.

“Since I've been here so long, I enjoy a little extra priviledge not given to the other employees, and I get a three months vacation each year. Of course, I go out to the ranch every week-end anyway, but on these vacations, I work on the ranch as I never had a job in town. I ride horses, tend to my cattle and sheep, have men repair my fences, and so on. I always leave the first of June, then on the first Saturday in June, all the employees in the store come up to my place for a barbecue and picnic. We have baseball games, trick and fancy horse riding, and other amusements which make a good time for everybody.